

to build relationships in the Middle East as opposed to tearing them down. Our goal is to establish greater stability and a more free society in the Middle East; to accomplish these lofty goals we must press forward with new initiatives as opposed to complete condemnations. Therefore, we must push for international election monitors in Lebanon so that free, fair, and transparent elections can be held on May 29, 2005, in accordance with all international standards and agreements. We must ensure that no outside nation or entity has undue influence on these elections, which should be determined only by the will of the Lebanese people.

I am in support of H. Res. 273 because the ideal of free and fair elections can not be questioned, especially when sanctioned by international law. However, I do hope the sponsors and supporters of this resolution will try to use this as an opportunity to open relations with Syria instead of further closing them. If we are to have true success in the Middle East we must ensure that we reach out to every nation in the region and its people, otherwise we are only cheating ourselves of a historic prospect for peace.

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. DANIEL E. LUNGREN of California). The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 273, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the resolution, as amended, was agreed to.

The title of the resolution was amended so as to read: "Resolution recognizing the courageous efforts of the people of Lebanon to restore their independence and urging the withdrawal of all Syrian forces from Lebanon, the support for free and fair democratic elections in Lebanon, and the development of democratic institutions and safeguards to foster sovereign democratic rule in Lebanon.".

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

WELCOMING HAMID KARZAI AND SUPPORTING STRONG AND ENDURING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN UNITED STATES AND AFGHANISTAN

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 153) welcoming His Excellency Hamid Karzai, the President of Afghanistan, on the occasion of his visit to the United States in May 2005 and expressing support for a strong and enduring strategic partnership between the United States and Afghanistan.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. CON. RES. 153

Whereas Afghanistan, a great nation located at the crossroads of many civiliza-

tions, has suffered the ravages of war, foreign intervention, occupation, and oppression;

Whereas the Afghan people courageously resisted the decade-long occupation of their country by the former Soviet Union, forcing a Soviet withdrawal in 1989 and thereby contributing to the end of the Cold War;

Whereas following the Soviet withdrawal, Afghanistan went through a period of chaos and conflict, exacerbated by insufficient attention from the international community, during which time the Taliban militia seized control of much of the country and provided a base of operations to Al Qaeda and other terrorist elements;

Whereas following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States launched Operation Enduring Freedom, liberating the Afghan people from tyranny, transforming Afghanistan from a haven for terrorists into a strategic partner in the struggle against international terrorism, and helping Afghans build a democratic government;

Whereas the Afghan Constitution, drafted by a broadly representative Loya Jirga, or Grand Council, and enacted on January 4, 2004, provides for equal rights for and full participation of women, mandates full compliance with international norms for human and civil rights, establishes procedures for free and fair elections, creates a system of checks and balances between the executive, legislative and judicial branches, encourages a free market economy and private enterprise, and obligates the state to prevent all types of terrorist activity and the production and trafficking of narcotics;

Whereas more than 10.5 million Afghan men and women voted in national presidential elections in October 2004, demonstrating commitment to democracy, courage in the face of threats of violence, and a deep sense of civic responsibility;

Whereas Hamid Karzai, formerly the interim President, was elected to a five-year term as Afghanistan's first democratically-elected President in the country's history;

Whereas nationwide parliamentary elections are planned for September 18, 2005, and further demonstrate the Afghan Government's commitment to adhere to democratic norms;

Whereas the Government of Afghanistan has demonstrated a firm commitment to halting the cultivation and trafficking of narcotics and has cooperated fully with the United States and its allies on a wide range of counter-narcotics initiatives;

Whereas in addition to military and law enforcement operations, President Karzai welcomes the United States and the international community to assist Afghanistan's counter-narcotics campaign by supporting programs to provide alternative livelihoods for farmers, sustained economic development, and governmental and security capacity building;

Whereas recognizing that long-term political stability requires sustained economic security, Afghanistan is striving to create an economic base to provide meaningful livelihoods for all of its people, and the United States has a cooperative interest in helping Afghanistan achieve this goal;

Whereas section 101(1) of the Afghanistan Freedom Support Act of 2002 (22 U.S.C. 7511(1)) declares that the "United States and the international community should support efforts that advance the development of democratic civil authorities and institutions in Afghanistan and the establishment of a new broad-based, multi-ethnic, gender-sensitive, and fully representative government in Afghanistan";

Whereas on June 15, 2004, during President Karzai's visit to the United States, President

George W. Bush stated: "Afghanistan's journey to democracy and peace deserves the support and respect of every nation. . . . The world and the United States stand with [the people of Afghanistan] as partners in their quest for peace and prosperity and stability and democracy.";

Whereas on June 15, 2004, in his address to a joint meeting of Congress, President Karzai stated: "We must build a partnership that will consolidate our achievements and enhance stability, prosperity and democracy in Afghanistan and in the region. This requires sustaining and accelerating the reconstruction of Afghanistan, through long-term commitment. . . . We must enhance our strategic partnership. The security of our two nations are intertwined.";

Whereas on April 13, 2005, while receiving the visiting United States Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, President Karzai, in expressing the desire of the Afghan people for a long-term strategic partnership with the United States, stated: "They want this relationship to be a wholesome one, including a sustained economic relationship, a political relationship, and most important of all, a strategic security relationship that would enable Afghanistan to defend itself, to continue to prosper, to stop interferences, the possibility of interferences in Afghanistan.";

Whereas the people of the United States, and their elected representatives, are honored to welcome President Karzai back to the United States in May 2005 on a visit that will further advance the close partnership between the United States and Afghanistan: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), That—

(1) Congress welcomes the first democratically-elected President of Afghanistan, His Excellency Hamid Karzai, as an honored guest and valued friend upon his visit to the United States in May 2005; and

(2) it is the sense of Congress that—

(A) a democratic, stable, and prosperous Afghanistan is a vital security interest of the United States; and

(B) a strong and enduring strategic partnership between the United States and Afghanistan should continue to be a primary objective of both countries to advance a shared vision of peace, freedom, security, and broad-based economic development between the two countries and throughout the world.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) and the gentleman from New York (Mr. ENGEL) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN).

GENERAL LEAVE

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the concurrent resolution under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Florida?

There was no objection.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

It is a pleasure to welcome His Excellency Hamid Karzai, the President of Afghanistan, to the United States and

to underscore the growing and strong friendship between our two nations.

As we continue to lead the fight against the forces of terror and oppression, we are joined by courageous leaders such as President Karzai, and we are motivated and strengthened by the strong will of the Afghan people, who experienced, firsthand, what it is to live under these dual threats.

Despite the Taliban's brutality and intolerable injustices that comprise the Taliban's legacy, their removal from power has generated clear and evident signs that the future of Afghanistan holds great promise. Millions of Afghans, once oppressed by the Taliban's terrorist regime, cast their ballots in their country's free elections in October of 2004 and elected Hamid Karzai as their leader.

A defender of freedom, President Karzai has worked tirelessly to unite and rebuild Afghanistan during this time of transition and has strived to bring security and stability while working to improve daily life.

Afghanistan has made great strides with respect to democracy, to reform, and to political openness. The women of Afghanistan, once forced to live as subhumans under a shroud that served as both a physical and symbolic instrument of the Taliban's oppression, are now vibrant and active participants in Afghan society. Afghans enjoy restored liberties and opportunities that were unheard of in recent memory. Schools have been reopened. A new banking law is in place. Businesses are blossoming around the country. But most importantly, there is hope for a better future.

The United States has stood by the Afghanistan dilemma during this critical time. We have stood by the Afghan people, helping them with the construction of centers for women, schools, building up their infrastructure, providing assistance to promote political participation, and to improve human rights for all. The United States must continue to fulfill its role as a friend to Afghanistan by providing resources and expertise and assistance to the people and the government of Afghanistan as they struggle to reconstruct themselves socially, economically, and politically.

I, therefore, Mr. Speaker, urge my colleagues to support this important resolution and clearly demonstrate to the people and the Government of Afghanistan that the United States stands firmly with them.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise in strong support of this resolution.

Mr. Speaker, I, first, again would like to commend the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN), my good friend, and the gentleman from New York (Mr. ACKERMAN), the Chair and ranking member of the Middle East and Central Asia Subcommittee, for introducing this important resolution.

□ 1700

Mr. Speaker, Afghanistan has made real progress toward becoming a stable, peaceful, and democratic state. The Taliban has been forced from power. The presidential election last October was an unqualified success with a massive turnout among men and women in defiance of Taliban threats, and progress has been made in restoring the basic human rights of Afghan women.

Before we even heard about the Taliban, Mr. Speaker, I was talking about them when they were in control when they were denying religious freedom to Hindus and others and talking about some of their despicable acts which, unfortunately, the world had then come to know.

But even today, Afghanistan is far from out of the woods. The Taliban and al Qaeda remnants have used recent events to further their agenda of undermining the peace and stability that President Karzai aims to bring to Afghanistan and its people. Progress in reconstruction and development, which is crucial to bringing economic opportunity and hope to millions, is painfully slow. But the biggest obstacle to democracy and development is the unprecedented scale of opium cultivation and narco-trafficking.

Mr. Speaker, in the face of these obstacles, President Karzai has remained steadfast and determined to bring democracy, prosperity, and security to the people of Afghanistan; and the United States must help President Karzai achieve this goal.

This resolution welcomes President Karzai upon his visit to the United States this week and recognizes that a democratic, stable, and prosperous Afghanistan is a vital national security interest of the United States. The resolution wisely states that a strong and enduring partnership between our two countries must remain a primary objective.

President Bush met today with President Karzai in the Oval Office. I am sure the President continued to offer the strong support of the American people to President Karzai. It is my hope that President Karzai offered his thoughts on how efforts against illegal drugs can and will be intensified.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot allow Afghanistan to lapse into chaos, war, and ruin once again. The United States must demonstrate its long-term commitment to a strong and enduring partnership with Afghanistan. President Karzai is Afghanistan's best chance at achieving peace, and we must do everything to help him realize this goal.

I had the pleasure of meeting President Karzai when he was last in town and met with members of the Committee on International Relations, and I must also add on a personal note that a very good friend of mine is a first cousin of his, so he does have strong family ties to the United States as well.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this resolution.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise today as a proud cosponsor of H. Con. Res. 153, which welcomes His Excellency Hamid Karzai, the President of Afghanistan, on the occasion of his visit to the United States in May 2005 and expresses support for a strong and enduring strategic partnership between the United States and Afghanistan. As the Co-Chair for the Congressional Afghan Caucus along with my colleague Chairman NEY, I am proud to welcome President Karzai back to the United States. I want to thank my colleague Ms. Ros-Lehtinen for introducing this appropriate concurrent resolution.

While there will be those who have the view that the war in Afghanistan is over and we should shift our view, the truth is that Afghanistan is as vital to our nation now as it was shortly after September 11th. Operation Enduring Freedom was a success in removing the Taliban leadership and giving the Afghan people new hope, however our work there is far from done. We must ensure that Afghanistan has a bright and productive future ahead of itself, in which peace and prosperity, will be possible. We can not make the same mistake we made in Afghanistan after the conclusion of the Cold War. The brave Afghan warriors defeated the Red Army, stopping them for completing another brutal assault upon an innocent nation. However, we rewarded their bravery by ignoring Afghanistan and allowing it to be a place where extremists like the Taliban and Al Qaeda could take refuge and indeed have sanctuary to build upon. We can not allow ourselves to make that same mistake again, we must show the Afghan people that we stand with them even after our own short term interests have been fulfilled. I have traveled to Afghanistan on a couple different occasions and I have seen the faces of the Afghan people and I know they are ready to embrace us, if only we can really support them for the long term.

I want to applaud President Karzai; he is a man of courage and vision. More than 10.5 million Afghan men and women voted in national presidential elections in October 2004, again giving credence to the fact that they have embraced democratic reform. The Afghan people have chosen Hamid Karzai, formerly the interim President, for a five-year term as Afghanistan's first democratically-elected President. I congratulate President Karzai for this victory, his job has not been easy and surely there were few who would have been willing to assume the burden of leadership that he did. His goals and aspirations will be for the long term health and security of Afghanistan and to get to that point he needs and deserves the full support of our nation.

Again, let me welcome President Karzai back to the United States, I stand among many Members who admire his will and resolve on behalf of his people. His accomplishments despite all the obstacles are certainly praiseworthy and deserving of recognition from the United States Congress. Let us all hope that this pattern of progress and success continues for President Karzai and Afghanistan as we move forward.

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. DANIEL E. LUNGREN of California). The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution, H. Con. Res. 153.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the concurrent resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

RECOGNIZING THE COAST GUARD, COAST GUARD AUXILIARY AND NATIONAL SAFE BOATING COUNCIL FOR THEIR EFFORTS TO PROMOTE NATIONAL SAFE BOATING WEEK

Mr. GILCHREST. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 243) recognizing the Coast Guard, the Coast Guard Auxiliary and the National Safe Boating Council for their efforts to promote National Safe Boating Week.

The Clerk read as follows:

H. RES. 243

Whereas recreational boating is one of our Nation's most popular pastimes, with an estimated 78,000,000 recreational boaters in the United States and nearly 13,000,000 recreational vessels registered;

Whereas the number of recreational boating fatalities has declined by more than half since 1970, thanks to the increased use of life jackets, cooperative boating safety education, enforcement efforts between the Coast Guard and State governments, and safer vessels and equipment manufactured in accordance with Coast Guard standards;

Whereas recreational boating accidents have nevertheless claimed the lives of 703 Americans in 2003, more than half of whose lives could have been saved with the proper use of a personal flotation device;

Whereas a continued emphasis on accident prevention can reduce recreational boating fatalities still further, and in particular deaths by drowning, which remain the leading cause of recreational boating fatalities; and

Whereas the National Safe Boating Council, with the support of the Coast Guard and the Coast Guard Auxiliary, has proposed designating the week of May 21 through 27, 2005, as National Safe Boating Week: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the House of Representatives—

(1) supports initiatives for recreational boating safety education and accident prevention to minimize the number of annual recreational boating fatalities;

(2) recognizes the Coast Guard, the Coast Guard Auxiliary, and the National Safe Boating Council for their efforts each year during May to highlight the importance of safe recreational boating; and

(3) supports the goals of National Safe Boating Week.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. GILCHREST) and the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. GILCHREST).

Mr. GILCHREST. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, H. Res. 243 was introduced by my colleagues, the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. COOPER) and the gentleman from Florida (Mr. SHAW), and recognizes the work of the Coast Guard, the Coast Guard Auxiliary, and the National Safe Boating Council in promoting boat safety.

I represent a district in which recreational boating plays a huge role in the lives of many of my constituents. Sailors, waters sports enthusiasts, and fishermen enjoy recreational boating on the Chesapeake Bay and the ocean side of my district.

Recreational boating is one of the Nation's most popular pastimes, and while the number of recreational boating fatalities has declined by more than half since 1970, many lives are still lost each year. More than half of these lives could be saved with the proper use of boating safety equipment. This resolution highlights the importance of safe recreational boating, and I urge my colleagues to support it.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I, too, represent an area where boating is a very important recreational activity, representing San Diego, California, with its wonderful bay, Mission Bay Park, and, of course, the Pacific Ocean, all as places where tens of thousands of people do their recreation; so I also support House Resolution 243.

This is National Safe Boating Week. Over 70 million people this year will participate in recreational boating activities in the United States. Unfortunately, about 700 of them will die from boating accidents. National Safe Boating Week is always the week before the Memorial day weekend, the start of the summer boating season. The goal this week is to educate the public about what they can do to enjoy our Nation's waters in a safe manner. In my State of California, two-thirds of the deaths from recreational boating accidents will occur during these summers months.

Mr. Speaker, safe boating begins before you even step in a boat by planning your trip and being safety conscious. The most important thing a boater can do to save their life is to wear a life jacket. That sounds simple; but in 2003, 416 boaters were drowned while not wearing their life jackets. Today there are Coast Guard-approved life jackets that are inflatable so you can easily sail and still be safe.

Just as in driving a car, alcohol and boating do not mix. Do not drink and drive in a boat.

Today there are over 17 million boats in our Nation's waterways. It is getting crowded, so everybody should know and follow the nautical rules of the road. If you are in a small boat, do not stand up. You could flip your boat, sending you and your family into the water.

Mr. Speaker, these are simple, but they are a few of the basic tips that

people should follow to have a safe and enjoyable time when they are boating.

The Coast Guard, the Coast Guard Auxiliary, and the National Safe Boating Council have boating safety education programs to help everyone learn how to boat safely. I encourage everyone to take advantage of these courses. If you follow their simple guidelines, you can have a fun and relaxing time while being as safe as possible.

Mr. Speaker, I strongly urge my colleagues to join us in support of House Resolution 243.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. GILCHREST. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman for sponsoring this piece of legislation as well. I would like to reiterate some of the comments that the gentleman made about boat safety, and that is when you get in a boat, it is like getting in a car. Do not drink and drive; do not drink and boat. Snap your safety belt in the car; put your life jacket on in the boat. Respect the people in your boat and respect other people in their boats; and respect the ecosystem that you are now treading on.

When you go out in a boat, enjoy yourself, enjoy the people that you are around, and enjoy the pristine nature of that particular environment. Boat Safety Week hopes to motivate people to understand the nature of their responsibility when they step in a boat, whether it is one with a big, powerful engine; whether it is a small motor boat; or I would recommend you try a kayak and canoe.

Of course, wear your life jacket regardless, respect yourself, respect your passengers, respect other boaters, and respect the pristine nature of the water.

Mr. BISHOP of New York. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H. Res. 243, a bill recognizing the Coast guard, the Coast Guard Auxiliary, and the National Safe Boating Council for their efforts to promote National Safe Boating Week.

In my district on Eastern Long Island, water safety is of paramount concern to residents, vacationers, and the tourism industry—one of the most important contributing elements of the local economy, which includes pleasure and commercial boating.

I commend the men and women of the Coast Guard, the Coast Guard Auxiliary and the National Safe Boating Council for their steadfast dedication to protecting boaters throughout the country. As we approach Memorial Day, kicking off the summer, we recognize National Safe Boating Week to encourage American boaters to be safe on the water and to promote the use of personal flotation devices (PFDs).

It is important to highlight the progress made to safeguard boating enthusiasts in recent years, particularly with more than 13 million watercraft registered in the U.S., a number that continues to skyrocket. Even with the ever-increasing number of people enjoying the water, there are fewer fatalities on the sea. This is in no small part due to the diligence of